

Specialist Skylar Anderson and, by extension, the Vermont National Guard. I want to recognize this milestone.

After graduating from a rigorous program at the 164th Regimental Training Institute in North Dakota, Specialist Anderson became the first female soldier in the country to be awarded a military occupation specialty as a combat engineer. In this position, she will enrich the capabilities of our Guard, bringing new skills and expertise to her work. While this is an impressive honor on its own, she did this while managing a full workload. While serving in the Vermont National Guard, she is a student at the University of Vermont. Specialist Anderson has clearly earned this recognition through her hard work and dedication.

Opportunities to serve in our military, whether soldier or sailor, airman, or marine, should be available to the best and brightest, regardless of gender, and Specialist Anderson has shown young women around the country that gender integration in the military is very real. Just last week, the Secretary of Defense declared all positions in the U.S. armed services open to females, removing artificial restrictions so that the United States can have the very best serving, like Specialist Anderson.

As a Vermonter, I am especially proud of her achievements, and I am also appreciative of the members of the Vermont National Guard who supported her throughout the process.

I ask unanimous consent that an article about Specialist Skylar Anderson published by National Guard Online be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the National Guard Online, Nov. 27, 2015]

VERMONT GUARD MEMBER BECOMES USA'S
FIRST FEMALE COMBAT ENGINEER

COLCHESTER, VT.—Spc. Skylar Anderson, a member of the Vermont Army National Guard, became the first female Soldier in the nation to be awarded the 12B Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) code as a combat engineer.

Anderson was previously a Multiple Launch Rocket System Operations/Fire Direction Specialist (13P) prior to re-classing to a combat engineer.

She graduated Aug. 31 from the 164th Regimental Training Institute (RTI) in Devils Lake, North Dakota.

Goarmy.com says that combat engineers primarily supervise, serve or assist as a member of a team when they are tackling rough terrain in combat situations. They provide their expertise in areas such as mobility, counter-mobility, survivability and general engineering. They construct fighting positions, fixed/floating bridges, obstacles and defensive positions, place and detonate explosives, conduct operations that include route clearance of obstacles and rivers, prepare and install firing systems for demolition and explosives, and detect mines visually or with mine detectors.

"I knew that I would be one of the first females to go, but not the first to graduate," Anderson said. "I knew that the MOS had just opened up a few months ago and having

previously been field artillery, I wanted to do it."

Originally enlisting in the New Hampshire National Guard, Anderson interstate transferred to the Vermont Army National Guard (VTARNG) in February of 2014, while pursuing a degree at the University of Vermont. Currently a junior, she is studying Animal Science, Equine Studies, in the pre-Veterinary program.

"I was floating around for a bit in Vermont," Anderson said in reference to how she became interested in becoming a 12B. Since the VTARNG didn't have 13Ps, Anderson briefly thought about joining the military police or working in supply. It wasn't until annual training this summer that she found out that the 12B MOS had opened up to women and decided that's what she wanted to do.

"Vermont is incredibly proud of Spc. Anderson and her accomplishments and achievements," said Maj. Gen. Steven A. Cray, the adjutant general, Vermont National Guard. "This is an important milestone not only for Spc. Anderson, but for all women in the integration of females into combat roles."

According to the 164th Regiment RTIs website, the 12B10 Combat Engineer MOS-T course provides reclassification training for military personnel with prior military experience, so that they may obtain the skills necessary to perform as a Combat Engineer.

There, Soldiers are provided technical training in basic demolitions, wire obstacles, explosive hazards, fixed bridging and urban operations.

"Spc. Anderson displayed tremendous personal courage in seeking out MOS reclassification to a specialty previously closed to women," said Capt. Eugene Enriquez, Commander, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 86th Brigade Special Troop Battalion, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain).

"The training at the school was awesome," Anderson said. "By the third day we were out in the field and at the range, using TNT, dynamite and det cord, blowing stuff up! This class was really hands on and that's what I loved about it."

ELECTIONS IN VENEZUELA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I want to express my outrage and horror at the out-of-control electoral situation in Venezuela—at the intimidation, violence, manipulation, and corruption by the Maduro government to manipulate election results in their favor.

For weeks, President Maduro has said that his party will do whatever it takes to stay in power, and I have no doubt that he will do everything he can to stay in power. In recent days, Maduro said: "If on December 6th the political-right wins, prepare to see a country in chaos, in violence. I will not turn over nor will I betray the revolution"—a clear statement of what's to come, but the world is watching.

In October, he gave a public speech in which he said that if the opposition wins, the country would enter into one of its "most turbulent periods" because he will not turn over the revolution, and if necessary, he would rule through what he called "a civic military union." Maduro's cronies have also made alarming, ominous statements in recent weeks warning the public that the ruling party will not lose control.

The government has already denied international election observers, so, clearly, we know what is about to happen.

Maduro's term is not yet up, but it is only a matter of time, and this election will be a demonstration of his complete failure. The fact is numbers don't lie, and the crushing poll numbers coming out are further proof the country is ready for fundamental change from a failed economic model that has run its course and needs to be done away with. All of this against a backdrop of continued deceit, repression, and violence.

Last week, in broad daylight, armed supporters of the government assassinated Luiz Manuel Diaz, the state-level head of the Acción Democrática, or Democratic Action Party, at an open-air rally in the state of Guarico—clearly a politically targeted assassination designed to terrorize opposition parties and their supporters. Luiz Manuel Diaz was standing 6 feet away from Lilian Tintori, whom I have met several times, the wife of the high-profile political prisoner, Leopoldo Lopez.

This level of unacceptable, blatant violence is appalling and has been condemned by OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, and by countless human rights organizations. Again, the world is clearly watching and demanding that the rule of law in Venezuela be reestablished.

The fact is the government is engaged in clear election manipulation. The government-controlled National Electoral Council has disqualified seven leading opposition figures from participating in the elections—disqualifications without justification and without a process to appeal. The disqualifications have targeted only members of the opposition: Maria Corina Machado, the diputada—assembly member—that received the single highest number of votes in the 2010 elections; Manuel Rosales, the former governor of Zulia state and a former Presidential candidate for the opposition; Leopoldo Lopez, currently being held in a military prison, the most high-profile political prisoner in the Americas.

The government has also fabricated a border crisis with neighboring Colombia as a pretext to declare a state of emergency, in 23 municipalities in 3 states along the Colombian-Venezuelan border. This allows the government to arbitrarily suspend the fundamental rights of citizens in these municipalities to a right to assembly, right to peaceful demonstrations—and, guess what, it just so happens that these municipalities are either swing districts or ones where the opposition won handily in the 2010 legislative elections. In these same three states, the opposition won 18 of the 27 seats contested. The government is even resorting to political tricks.

In one district, in the city of Maracay, the leading opposition candidate is named Ismael Garcia, a lifelong political veteran. The government

managed to find a 28-year-old parking attendant named Ismael Garcia, who is running under a party name similar to the opposition candidate, with a logo nearly identical.

In another area in the capital of Caracas, the National Statistics Institute and National Electoral Council have determined that, by the end of the year, 128,000 voters are scheduled to move out of a district largely supportive of the opposition to a district supportive of the government. This move is large enough to decrease by one the number of deputies that the opposition district will elect and enough to increase by one the number of deputies that the pro-government district will elect.

The National Statistics Institute and National Electoral Council acknowledge that 134,000 votes will move back to the pro-opposition district by the middle of next year, which means 130,000 people are moving for a period of 6 to 9 months.

The Maduro government can't believe they can hide from these obvious tactics of political tricks to rob the people of Venezuela of their right to a free and fair election. They can't be so naïve to think that these ridiculous tactics are going unnoticed. We are not blind to it. We are watching. And I come to the floor of the Senate to send a clear message that makes it clear that the world is watching and waiting for the results of the election and the aftermath.

Against this backdrop of violence, intimidation, corruption, and election fraud, the Venezuelan Government has routinely denied the presence of credible international election observers. If the Venezuelan Government was interested in guaranteeing the transparency, objectivity, and credibility of the elections, it would have invited the OAS—the region's preeminent multilateral body—to observe the elections.

Since 1989, the OAS has conducted more than 160 election observation missions in 24 countries. The OAS Secretary General has repeatedly offered to observe, but Maduro has turned him down. The EU has also offered to observe—also rejected by the government. Instead, the Venezuelan Government has opted for a mission from Union de Naciones Suramericanas, UNASUR, which conducts “electoral accompaniment” rather than “election observation.” The technical rigor of the UNASUR mission has been called into question by many members of the international community. Brazil's Supreme Electoral Court banned Brazil's participation in the UNASUR mission. Chile and Uruguay also will not participate in the UNASUR mission. As a Washington Post headline put it this week, “Venezuela [is heading] to a pivotal election; without a referee.”

As Venezuela heads into this election, nationwide polls are showing a strong and sustained trend in favor of the opposition. National polling shows opposition candidates leading by 28

points. This growing advantage is the result of an increasingly dire outlook that reflects the state of the nation. The people of Venezuela have and are suffering economic hardship. They are subjected to increased societal violence. They have seen more and more evidence that senior government officials are personally and deeply involved in drug trafficking, deeply involved in money laundering. In fact, his own family members have been arrested for drug trafficking.

And, to make matters worse, as President Maduro, a former bus driver, has driven his country's economy off a cliff, there have been shortages of beef and milk, chicken and eggs, rice and pasta; there have been shortages of soap for bathing and diapers for small children. And this trend will likely get worse. This year, the IMF predicts that Venezuela's GDP will contract by 10 percent—the single largest economic contraction in the world this year. The country is also suffering from the highest levels of inflation in the entire world, more than 150 percent in 2015 according to the IMF, and expected to surpass 200 percent in 2016.

As economic hardship grows, it shouldn't be a complete surprise that criminality in the country has worsened—the murder rate more than doubling over the past decade. According to the Venezuela Violence Observatory, the per capita murder rate in Venezuela was 37 per 100,000 in 2005, 54 per 100,000 in 2010, and 82 per 100,000 in 2014. And things are even worse in the capital Caracas, where the per capita murder rate is approaching 125 per 100,000 residents. This puts Caracas among the top five most violent cities in the world and on par with the carnage generally seen only in war zones.

On top of this widespread societal violence, in 2014, the world bore witness to Venezuelan security forces violently deployed on the streets to suppress peaceful protests occurring throughout the country that has left 43 people dead on both sides of the political divide, more than 50 documented cases of torture of opposition activists, and thousands of arrests. Throughout this violence, respected international human rights organization Human Rights Watch found that human rights abuses were a “systematic practice” committed by Venezuelan security forces.

To make matters worse, a darker and more sinister narrative has emerged from Venezuela in 2015. In March of this year, the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network—known as FinCEN—announced the Private Bank of Andorra is a “foreign financial institution of primary money laundering concern.” Among other concerns, FinCEN found that the bank had been involved in a scheme that siphoned off roughly \$2 billion from Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, a scheme that surely included widespread involvement and knowledge of Venezuelan Government officials. The world is watching.

In May of this year, in a Wall Street Journal exclusive, the world was informed that the Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and several Federal prosecutors' offices are investigating Diosdado Cabello for involvement in drug trafficking, a man who serves as the head of Venezuela's National Assembly and someone generally regarded as the second most powerful figure in the government's coalition. And now he is apparently wanted for turning Venezuela into a global cocaine hub.

And in October, in another incredibly well-documented piece, the Wall Street Journal revealed how money laundering and embezzlement inside Venezuelan state oil giant Venezuela was directed from the highest levels, including by former PDVSA president Rafael Ramirez. These two incidents are part of a long and troubling series of disturbing revelations about how the highest levels of the power are directly responsible for the Venezuelan state becoming penetrated by drug trafficking and criminality.

With such sinister trends becoming commonplace in Venezuela, it is important to recognize that a sea change of opinion is taking place in Latin America, and increasingly, key political leaders are speaking out forcefully against what they are seeing in Venezuela.

In September of this year, 34 former Presidents and heads of state from across Latin America and the Caribbean met in Bogota and issued a declaration calling for international election observation, greater safeguards for Venezuelan voters, and the release of political prisoners in the country.

Last month, the secretary general of the OAS Luis Almagro released a scathing letter to the head of Venezuela's National Electoral Council, laying out all of his concerns with the process running up to the December 6 elections and calling for an immediate course correction.

Also, last month, I was proud to join with 17 of my colleagues here in the U.S. Senate, 32 Brazilian senators, 57 Colombian senators, 12 Chilean senators, 26 Costa Rica Assembly members, and 13 Peruvian members of Congress—more than 150 legislators from across the Americas—in an unprecedented showing of unity to call for election observation, speak out against the disqualification of opposition candidates, and call for the release of political prisoners. And just last week, it was important to see Argentina's President-elect Mauricio Macri calling for the South American trade block Mercosur to review whether Venezuela should be suspended from the block for violating its democracy clause and failing to uphold human rights.

The question then remains, what can we do? What can the United States do? As elections are held in Venezuela this weekend, it is imperative that we all remain clear-eyed about the challenges at hand in the country. For 15 years,

we have watched as President Maduro and former-President Chavez have systematically dismantled democracy in the country. They have removed checks on the executive. They have corrupted the judiciary and the rule of law. They have usurped the powers of the legislature. They have politicized the military. And they have suppressed freedom of the press.

No one should be surprised that 15 years of democratic deterioration has led to economic ruin, to rampant criminality, and to an increasingly dangerous political polarization. But the first step to correct course and help Venezuelans back from the brink of being a failed state is the exercise this weekend of that most fundamental democratic right with a huge voter turnout that could help move the country back toward democracy and the rule of law.

We should take note that Latin America is speaking out forcefully about the situation in Venezuela, but we in the United States should be preparing our own response. Last week, the Washington Post Editorial Board noted that should the vote be disrupted in Venezuela, the “U.S. should be ready to respond with censure and sanctions.” I couldn’t agree more.

In December of 2014, the U.S. Congress, with the unanimous consent of both Chambers, approved the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act—legislation which I authored and introduced with Senators Nelson, Rubio, Kirk, and McCain. This bipartisan bill called for mandatory sanctions against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and provided the administration with the authorities it needs. The administration has used these sanctions once, but we should be prepared, if necessary, to use them again.

We know what is happening in Venezuela: subversion of democracy through state-sponsored violence; repression; hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans in the streets earlier this year protesting alarming levels of violence and crime; sky-high inflation rates; the scarcity of food and basic consumer goods. That is today’s Venezuela. The question is: Can we make tomorrow better for the people of Venezuela?

The world watched as President Maduro and his government responded to protests with a brutal display of force not seen in our hemisphere in over a decade. The results: more than 40 deaths, more than 50 documented cases of torture, and thousands of unlawful detentions. In May, Human Rights Watch released a devastating report that said Venezuelan human rights violations “were part of a systematic practice by Venezuelan security forces” and that these abuses were intended to “punish people for their political views.”

As I have said repeatedly and as is the case today, not one Venezuelan Government official or member of the security forces has been held account-

able for their role in beating, shooting, jailing, or torturing peaceful protesters—not one. Now they threaten to hijack the electoral process, and they must know that the world is watching and that there will be consequences to their actions.

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT DICK DOUGLAS, JR.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring my constituent Robert Dick Douglas, Jr. Mr. Douglas earned Eagle Scout rank 90 years ago today, making him the longest serving Eagle alive.

The Boy Scouts of America recently highlighted Mr. Douglas’ life in their magazine, which I think would impress anyone who reads it. I am pleased to highlight some of the points in the article.

A native of Greensboro, Mr. Douglas eagerly joined the Boy Scouts the very same day that he celebrated his 12th birthday. After earning his Eagle Scout award on December 8, 1925, Mr. Douglas was one of three scouts selected for an African safari with famed photographers and adventurers Martin and Osa Johnson. Upon his return from this journey, Douglas coauthored the best selling documentary “Three Boy Scouts in Africa,” which went on to sell 125,000 copies in its first year of publication. The book afforded Douglas the opportunity to tour the Nation speaking with the likes of Amelia Earhart at school and civic assemblies.

The publisher was evidently so impressed with Douglas’ work that he sent the young Eagle Scout to Alaska to write another adventure book titled “A Boy Scout in the Grizzly Country.” From that experience, Douglas became an advocate of land and wildlife conservation and, when he returned home, began sharing his newfound knowledge with the Nation through public appearances.

Douglas’ successes continued well into adulthood, going on to graduate from law school at Georgetown University and to become a labor and employment law attorney at his father’s legal practice. Mr. Douglas served as a lawyer for over 70 years and managed to make his way before the Supreme Court. Douglas also served in the FBI, where he had the chance to work under J. Edgar Hoover for a time. Mr. Douglas retired at the age of 96.

In recognition of his longevity and commitment to scouting and his community, the 103-year-old Douglas was presented with the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award on September 24, 2015. During the ceremony, Mr. Douglas extolled scouting as a significant influence on his life. He insists to this day that scouting taught him that he could do just about anything that he wanted to undertake. It is with great pleasure that I pay tribute to Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., today on his 90th anniversary of attaining Eagle Scout.

RECOGNIZING MURDOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, today I wish to applaud Murdock Elementary School of Lafayette, IN, for being recognized as a 2015 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

Established in 1982, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has recognized over 7,500 public and nonpublic schools that have demonstrated a vision of educational excellence for all students, regardless of their social or economic background. Since its inception, this program has offered the opportunity for schools in every State to gain recognition for educational accomplishments in closing the achievement gaps among student groups.

Murdock Elementary School continues to be one of the best performing schools in the State of Indiana. It has been named an Indiana Four Star School for 4 consecutive years.

In 2014, Murdock Elementary School’s ISTEP+ pass rate for English/Language Arts scores reached 97.7 percent. Mathematics scores exceeded 95 percent, and the overall score for the school hit 94.3 percent.

Murdock Elementary School’s effectiveness can be found in its holistic approach and dedication to student achievement. Murdock staff, students, and students’ families work together to teach and instill values that develop strong character and demonstrate that every kid matters: honesty, effort, caring, respect, and teamwork. With some of the highest English and mathematics scores in Indiana, Murdock Elementary School is a stellar example of the benefits that result from dedication, motivation, collaboration, and family partnership in education.

I would like to acknowledge Murdock Elementary School principal, Janell Uerkwitz, the entire staff, the student body, and their families. The effort, dedication, and value you put into education led not only to this prestigious recognition, but will benefit you and our communities well into the future.

On behalf of the citizens of Indiana, I congratulate Murdock Elementary School, and I wish the students and staff continued success in the future.

RECOGNIZING NORTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, today I wish to applaud North Elementary School of Poseyville, IN, for being recognized as a 2015 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

Established in 1982, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has recognized over 7,500 public and nonpublic schools that have demonstrated a vision of educational excellence for all students, regardless of their social or economic background. Since its inception, this program has offered the opportunity for schools in every State to